

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

DECEMBER 1991

ONE DOLLAR



Editor's Page

I am feeling very guilty these days. Magazines, newsletters, and press releases cross my desk every day with stories of attacks upon the environment.

"Write your congressman about the new proposed Bush administration change in the wetlands bill!"

"Let your representative in the General Assembly know now about your feelings regarding a proposed highway that would cut through the Mount Rogers Recreation Area!"

"Save the rainforests! End the illegal pet trade in parrots! Write to your Senator!"

"Do it today! Do it today! Do it today. . ." The pleas, the descriptions of the world's woes, go on and on.

Serious environmental matters scream out to us for attention everyday, demanding that we as citizens of a democratic society take responsibility for the direction of our government's policies and decisions. I'm ashamed to say that I'm becoming numb to much of it.

The three-week-old draft of a letter to my representative in the General Assembly about some urgent matter with serious consequences languishes in my computer. The problem is, I can't ever remember what district I'm in, much less who my representative is.

The last election came and went and I couldn't keep the faces and the names straight. I read the literature about them, and they all sounded the same. The Sierra Club even sent me a notice saying they had environmental records available on all the candidates. Did I take them up on their offer to make an informed decision? You've got to be kidding. I never got around to it.

Yes, I'll admit, I'm shamefully lazy. There is no one threatening my

life for neglecting my civic duties (at least not at the moment), and therefore, I more often than not flagrantly ignore my responsibilities as a citizen of this country.

None of this makes me feel very good. Sometimes I do manage to get a letter off in the mail, but even then I often feel it's kind of like sending a letter to Santa Claus; it's sent off with a whole lot of faith. There's never much concrete evidence that your letter ever reached the right person in the first place. In the second place, you just have to make yourself believe that someone actually will read your painstakingly composed composition.

I have been to one planning meeting in the nine years I've lived in Henrico County. When I got up to talk, what came out was a garbled plea for an understanding of the process. I wanted to know how I could exercise my right to have a hand in retaining the quality of life in my community, but I ended up stammering instead to puzzled and patronizing looks. One supervisor, I recall, pitied me and called me shortly thereafter, expressing her own frustration with the "progress" in the county. But even she sighed and admitted that it had already gone too far to reverse.

I realized then that I had a lot to learn. An old friend of mine, Marilyn Garlick, heads up a citizen's group dedicated to preserving the quality of life in Hanover County, and she has learned how to operate in the rarefied air of public meetings. I believe it has disillusioned her once or twice, but I know her well enough to bet there aren't many who win against her sharp and fearless tongue. Marilyn is well-suited to the game. She does her research and she enjoys the parrying with her elected officials. I have no doubt that she

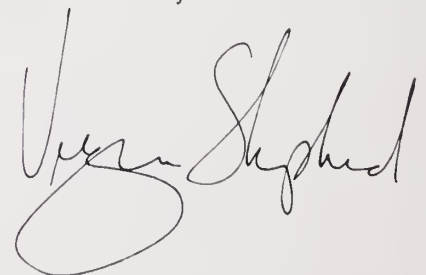
would pooh-pooh any excuses about not being able to get your voice heard. "The only thing stopping you", I know she would say with a wicked grin, "is the fact that you don't want it badly enough."

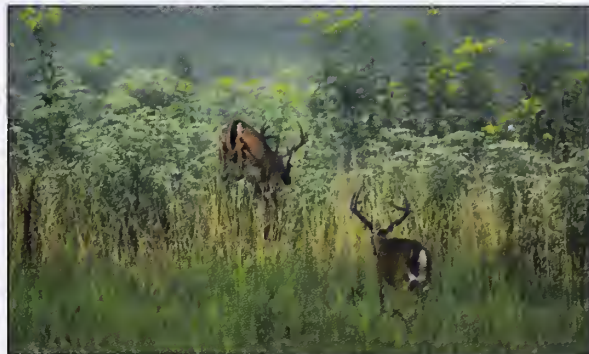
She'd be right, you know. It's too easy to let the Marilyn Garlick's of the world speak for us shy wallflowers. It temporarily soothes the conscience to send a letter off every once in a while to some congressman far away about saving the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge from oil drilling. But, the truth is, there's not much satisfaction in it, especially when the news never seems to get any better, and the losses all seem to be forever while the victories are never secure.

Still, I don't think I could ever fill a Marilyn Garlick's shoes. I don't have the sharp wit and quick tongue for the successful battles. But, upon rereading *The Power of the Myth* by the late Joseph Campbell, I came across a new perspective on changing the world:

"People have the notion of saving the world by shifting things around, changing the rules, and who's on top, and so forth. No, no! . . . The thing to do is to bring life to it, and the only way to do that is to find in your own case where the life is . . ."

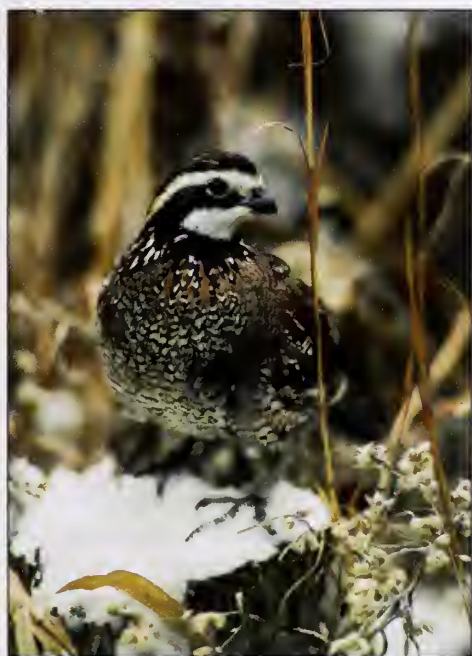
It suddenly occurred to me that maybe there are other paths for those of us who believe in changing the world, that don't have to involve letters to legislators or public hearings. Maybe each of us has to find our own way to make a difference, and it doesn't necessarily have to be a well-travelled one. It just has to be taken.





Wildlife of all kinds are benefitting from the helping hand of Quail Unlimited in Virginia. See page 18; photo by Bill Lea.

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE



Cover: Bobwhite quail by Lloyd B. Hill

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Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources



Forest Stewardship A Gift That Endures

Photo by Dwight Dyke

by Irv Kenyon

Looking for a gift this year that will last? Well, if you own 20 or more acres of land, the Forest Stewardship Program promises you a gift that will last for generations.

We've all received those kind of gifts at Christmas; those given with good intentions and best wishes that just don't endure or don't exactly touch the heart. Some either break, fall apart, or get stepped on. Some have the sentimental attachment we save for a used vacuum cleaner. And some hang around for awhile, but then migrate to some secret place, to rest in peace—until 20 years later when the house is sold.

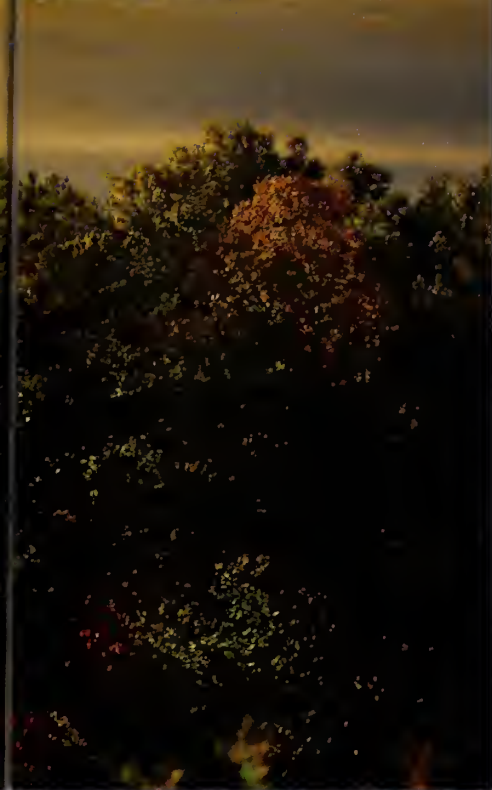
Gifts that do endure are sometimes those of our own choosing, requiring some work, and rewarding us with the lasting satisfaction of a job well done.

Owners of private woodlands looking for something really special this year might like to treat themselves to the ideas contained in a creative, new forest management package—

the Forest Stewardship Program. Wrapped in the concept of a land ethic, the Forest Stewardship Program will appeal to those who would like to apply sound management to all of their forest resources, but would also enjoy the flexibility of deciding which of these will receive the greatest attention. Forest Stewardship takes the approach to total resource management as one might the arrival of new litter of puppies; it's alright to pick a favorite or two, but none can be neglected.

Individually packaged within Forest Stewardship are items of almost every woodland owner's interest. There's wildlife, timber, conservation of soil and water quality, outdoor recreation, and the protection of unique natural or historical environments. Each of these also comes complete

Ship— ures



according to DOF. This can be costly, just in terms of lost timber value. Additionally, with not even a standard forest management plan, thousands of landowners and millions of acres are often untouched even by the basic merits of Best Management Practices (BMPs); practices designed to control soil erosion and maintain water quality.

Even more frequently absent from the files of many landowners are comprehensive plans, such as provided by the Forest Stewardship Program, that address total woodland management. This can leave still other resources without the attention they deserve. For example: wildlife, the glamour resource to many landowners, is often taken for granted and seldom actively managed or its needs addressed in long-range planning. In addition, with no planning, often the protection of unique natural or historical sites that may exist are overlooked, or the protection of rare or endangered plants and animals. And some landowners may be unaware of opportunities to provide outdoor recreation for family or friends or for public use, potentially providing a source of added income.

with instructions, in the form of technical assistance from professional natural resource managers to help landowners achieve satisfying results. Expect nothing this grand from any mail-order house, not even L. L. Bean.

Properly managed, the aesthetic, recreational, and economic values found in Virginia's privately owned, nonindustrial woodlands are gifts to be enjoyed by current landowners and passed on to future generations. The Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF) reports over 75 percent of the state's forestland—11 million acres—is individually owned. This places a tremendous amount of the state's timber and other natural resources squarely in the hands of over 300,000 individual landowners. Yet most of these woodland properties do not have a forest management plan of any kind,

Many landowners do not know where to turn for help, and what's more, they don't realize that such help is available—free. Some may assume that their forest resources are doing quite well simply by leaving them alone, not realizing that neglect may have the same serious consequences as abuse. Still others, those most concerned with aesthetic values, may have thought—even feared—that a forest management plan is little more than a preamble to a logging contract. Landowners can enter the Forest Stewardship Program with the confidence that their resources will be enhanced and their personal values insured.

The foundation of the Stewardship Program for individual landowners is a Forest Resource Management Plan (FRMP). To initiate a plan, or to have a current forest management plan updated with Stewardship concepts, landowners should first contact their local Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF) office. The plan will be written, or revised, by a professional from the ranks of DOF, industry, or consulting foresters.

The first thing the forester must know are the landowner's primary and secondary goals, chosen from four resource categories. Once these are designated, the forester will contact other resource managers, like the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, for example, giving them the opportunity to make recommendations according to the landowner's objectives, or to review and comment on the written plan before it is submitted to the landowner. Depending on the chosen objectives, other resource managers giving assistance with planning may be fish or



Landowners signed up with the Forest Stewardship Program can emphasize any number of natural resources goals in their land management plan, including the enhancement of wildlife, timber value, or the protection of native flora. (Yellow ladyslippers; photo by Bill Lane.)

wildlife biologists, soil or water conservationists, outdoor recreation specialists, or other environmentalists. If your situation warrants, you may even hear from an archaeologist, a botanist or a benthologist; the latter if you happen to have a stream or lake bottom environment deserving special attention.

With the Forest Resource Management Plan completed, signed by all resource managers involved, and returned to the landowner, implementation of the plan begins, using the most practical, widely accepted procedures. Implementation of some recommended practices may depend on the time of year, weather conditions, and perhaps even market conditions if the harvest of timber has been recommended.

The "feather in the cap" for participants in the Forest Stewardship Program is Forest Stewardship Certification. After accomplishing, or having made significant progress towards accomplishing planned practices, a certification team, including one forester and other resource managers, will inspect the property to determine if Stewardship and FRMP guidelines have been adequately followed to warrant certification. If so, then landowners will be nominated for certification.

Forest Stewardship is already underway for some landowners. The two most popular objectives chosen during the seedling stage of the program have been timber production and the enhancement of wildlife habitat. According to a DOF report, 82 percent of all landowners now in line for Stewardship certification have chosen timber products as either their primary or secondary objectives; 73 percent have chosen wildlife. By the popular desire of many landowners to attract and hold wildlife on their property, it's evident that the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries personnel have been, and will continue to be, actively involved with Stewardship, and this opportunity is being welcomed.

Over half of the landowners so far have combined timber and wildlife in

selecting their two major resource objectives. To some, landowner choices that combine timber and wildlife may seem to be in conflict with each other. Not so. With careful planning, timber management, including harvest, can be just what is needed to enhance the habitat of a number of wildlife species, particular game animals.

Healthy stands of older age hardwoods, insect and disease free, are those stands most likely to insure a plentiful supply of hard mast (acorns, hickory nuts, etc.) that is a seasonal but major food for an array of woodland wildlife. Healthy stands are also important to landowners, from the aesthetic and economic points of view.

Still, the harvest of timber can benefit wildlife far more than is sometimes realized, depending on the type of harvest, size, shape and other considerations. Consistently, the most desirable effect that comes from cutting timber is the renewal of natural plant succession, that progression of vegetation from natural grasses and forbs (weeds and wildflowers essentially), to mature forest. The early stages of plant succession, consisting of the grasses, forbs, shrubs, vines and seedling trees, are those that provide the plant diversity that is so vital to many forms of wildlife.

Clearcuts, thought by some to be avoided at all costs, are often a vision of paradise to bobwhite quail. In time, deer, turkeys and grouse also reap their rewards in food and cover that clearcutting encourages. Where wildlife habitat is uppermost in the landowner's plans, clearcuts should be as small as practical, irregular in shape and located where they will be of the greatest benefit. Using fire to prepare a clearcut for replanting provides even more ben-



efits, especially to bobwhites. If replanted with pine, wide spacing of seedlings will extend, by several years, the areas usefulness.

Thinning timber, frequently called "timber stand improvement" (TSI) by foresters, is another forestry practice that can benefit wildlife. The greatest benefits will follow a "heavy" thinning; one that allows sufficient sunlight to reach the forest floor and encourages low-growing plants.

Group selection cuts, the harvest



Any landowner with 20 or more acres of land can qualify for the Forest Stewardship Program, and receive professional help to manage the wildlife, timber, soil and water quality, recreational uses, or the unique natural or historical environments of their land - for free.

(Clockwise from left: The Stewardship Program sign; photo by Robbie May. Raccoon in den tree: photo by Bill Lea. Hiking trail; photo by Dwight Dyke. Wild turkey; photo by Lloyd B. Hill.)



of timber from small, scattered sites within a forested area, create "wildlife openings." These, while providing added plant diversity, also provide "edge," the meeting of vegetative types. Edge is a component of major importance in any setting that is likely to attract wildlife. "Daylighting" woodland roads is another way to renew plant succession and create a significant amount of edge along the way.

With all harvest methods, leaving ample mast-producing trees through-

out the cut area or along the edges and drainages is important. This includes both hard and soft mast producers. "Den trees" also need to be identified, and marked to be left standing.

If wildlife is a prime objective, BMPs should be implemented in a fashion that will be of the greatest benefit. All seeding to prevent erosion and protect water quality should be with seed or plant varieties that will be well utilized by wildlife. Haul roads, log decks, fire lines, and any other sites

where there has been soil disturbance should be seeded or planted with varieties recommended for wildlife. These practices, often in the form of herbaceous seedlings, add still greater plant diversity and edge.

To be eligible for the Forest Stewardship Program, you must own 20 acres or more of forested land. The definition of "forested" is pretty broad, so don't despair just because you don't have 20 acres of prime hardwoods or similar acreage in tall, whispering pines. Even open land that you plan to plant in trees will qualify as forest to get you started.

A companion program to Forest Stewardship is the Stewardship Incentive Program (SIP). The purpose of SIP is to provide the incentive to implement recommended and approved practices by sharing the cost of these with the landowner. Like Forest Stewardship itself, SIP cost-sharing will be applied to a wide array of resources and landowner objectives.

As the landowner, you personally will be required to sign a nonbinding pledge to uphold the Stewardship concepts on your property and to implement the recommendations made to help you reach your objectives. The signed pledge serves as evidence that your intentions are sincere and that you are ready to have the forester and other resource managers proceed.

And finally, the gift of Forest Stewardship won't break—or get stepped on, although it may fall apart if allowed to. More likely, however, for those who value their natural resources, the results of stewardship can become a perpetual, sentimental favorite. The Forest Stewardship Program offers long standing rewards in satisfaction—a gift that endures.

Merry Christmas.

For more information on the Forest Stewardship Program, contact your local DOF forester or the Virginia Department of Forestry, P.O. Box 3758, University Station, Charlottesville, VA 22903. □

Irv Kenyon is a wildlife biologist with the Department's Wildlife Division.

photo by Gregory K. Scott



Jump Shooting Grouse

by Gerald Almy

The December woods were still and brittle cold as I eased along the thick, tangled mountain-side on the G. R. Thompson Wildlife Management Area in Fauquier County. While my feet searched for sure footing on the steep slope, my eyes scanned ahead searching the terrain for good grouse cover. A large blow-down caught my eye, and I instinctively veered towards it.

Grapevines swaddled the fallen tree. Greenbriars grew just to the left. It looked like a perfect spot for a grouse to be hunkered next to. As I eased up to the fallen tree and surrounding cover, I felt my fingers tighten their hold on the smooth, dark stock of the 16-gauge side-by-side my father had hunted grouse with 30 years before.

When I came within five yards of the cover, I hesitated, holding the double at port arms. Suddenly, the silence of the winter woods was shattered by the thundering wings of a mature grouse flushing up the hollow to my left. I pulled swiftly past the streaking brown target, squeezed the front trigger and the large cock bird fell to the ground as a puff of russet feathers drifted softly down onto the frozen winter landscape.

It was a sweet sensation to connect on the first shot of the day, since usually it takes several empty shells before I put a ruffed grouse in the bag. But luck was with me this morning.

As I approached the fallen bird, suddenly another grouse soared from the cover, banked hard, then glided down the mountainside. I tried a quick snap shot, but missed cleanly.

There was little cause for worry, though. The day was a good one for grouse hunting with light winds, low cloud cover and cool temperatures. By the time my legs cried out for relief from the day's hunt, I had flushed five more grouse in the four hours of mountain walking, seeing three of them, shooting at two, bagging one. With a brace of grouse in the bag, it

was definitely an above average day as I trudged up the trail back to the truck, unloaded my bounty and headed home. There would be delicious dining in days ahead when the birds were roasted to a golden brown essence in the oven with a dab of butter, a few spices and a splash of Chardonnay.

Grouse hunting with bird dogs is a time-honored sport. But as this hunt on a heavily-used wildlife management area in northern Virginia showed, pursuing ruffed grouse *without* a setter, Brittany or pointer can still be a rewarding experience.

Anytime I have a chance to hunt with someone who owns a good mountain dog, I jump at the chance. But the fact is dogs that handle grouse well are few and far between. Often hunters without dogs will bring home

You don't need a dog to grouse hunt in Virginia's mountains. What you do need is a strong constitution and a plan to tackle the grouse-rich woods of our state.

just as many birds as those with canine assistance if the quality of the dogs is only so-so. Over the years I've hunted without a dog, I've averaged one bird per four hour hunt—not a lot, but enough to make this an absorbing sport.

Very little gear is required to jump shoot grouse, but having the right items can help you enjoy the experience and improve your odds of success. A canteen, lunch, hunting vest, brush pants, flannel shirt, hat, polypropylene or Thermax underwear, comfortable hiking boots, two pairs of socks, and light gloves are the main items required. Some people prefer to wear a hunting coat, but I've found you can swing more freely when shooting with a vest and won't perspire as much. Polypropylene and Thermax are the best materials for

underwear because they wick moisture away from your body and dry quickly when you sweat (which you *will* do when grouse hunting.) Brush pants should be rugged to put up with lots of contact with thorns and stickers and boots should be thoroughly broken in.

For guns, 12, 16, 20 and 28-gauge are all appropriate for grouse. I prefer the 16 and 20, but if you shoot a 12 better or are skilled with a 28, either of those will also do the job. The main requirements in a grouse shotgun are lightness, a short barrel, and a reasonably open choke—true skeet or improved cylinder. Modified and improved is acceptable in a double, but never carry a full choked gun into the grouse woods. Even a modified choke is often too tight for the close shots you'll get. The majority of the grouse I shoot are from 10-30 yards away, where no choke at all is required.

Best loads for grouse are high powered numbers 6, 7 1/2 or 8. Even though they weigh 1 1/2 to 2 pounds, grouse are fragile, and 7 1/2's or 8's are usually the best choice, since the increased number of pellets improve odds for connecting. Test fire several brands and shot sizes in your gun at ranges of 10-40 yards and then choose the ones that seem to offer the best shot distribution and number of pellets in the target.

Finding grouse in Virginia means hitting forested areas in the western third of the state. The Appalachian, Blue Ridge and Allegheny Mountains all contain good populations; the foothills extending into the piedmont also hold some birds. Although grouse seem to be repopulating some areas east of I-95, a continuous closed season is in effect there to allow the population to become well established.

You can find the brown birds on many wildlife management areas in the western part of the state. Consult the directory of these areas in the September 1991 *Virginia Wildlife* for listings of which ones have grouse. The Jefferson and George Washington National Forests also hold good numbers of birds. Grouse are not

evenly distributed, however, and finding good areas means homing in on their preferred habitat where food and cover are abundant.

Early in the year, ridgetops can be good because of the mast available there. After leaves fall from the trees, the cover is sparser there and birds often move lower into hollows and draws, stream bottoms, pine thickets, and areas with honeysuckle, green leaves and ferns, as well as overgrown farms. Abandoned orchards can be prime spots early, since grouse love apples.

As leaves fall from trees, jump shooting becomes more productive, because there are fewer places for the birds to find cover and they are more concentrated. Look for them in thick, brushy, snarly looking areas with grapevines, laurel, rhododendron, greenbriars and honeysuckle. Conifer thickets can be good, particularly in cold windy weather or stormy conditions. Early and late in the day you'll also find grouse near or in evergreens, because they often roost there. Another way to pinpoint grouse is to look for cutover areas that have been cleared a few years previous and are growing back with lots of low brush, berries and tender leaves for them to feed on.

As much as anything, grouse jump shooters seem to go by "feel" when searching for birds. You'll quickly get an instinctive idea what types of habitat hold birds, even if you can't identify the plants and trees growing there. Look for thick and tangled-looking cover with downfalls, second-growth timber, briars, grapevines and honeysuckle—areas that you often have to fight your way through.

Once you've found such a location, map out a plan of how you want to approach it. The best strategy might be to make a long oval walk through the cover, or a back and forth zigzag pattern paralleling various levels of a mountainside might work well. The aim is to cover the maximum amount of the habitat with the least duplication of effort by going over the same area twice. You should also strive to con-

serve energy by doing more sideways walking along the mountain and less up and down travel, which is particularly hard on the legs.

Sometimes you can probe one edge of a ridge spine, then cross over and walk back to the truck on the opposite side. Or you can trek up one side of a hollow, then cross over and hike down the other side.

Be sure to pace yourself so you don't wear out too quickly, and punctuate the walk with lots of pauses. These rest your body, but more importantly, they flush grouse. When you move steadily through grouse cover, birds may not be particularly alarmed and simply hunker down and allow you to walk past without flushing, relying on their camouflaged woods colors to protect themselves. If you pause for 10-30 seconds, however, these same birds feel threatened, like they've been detected by a predator that is about to attack. They think they must flush to escape and you get a shot you wouldn't have otherwise had. It's also a good time to get a shot, since you can have your gun up, feet firmly planted and be reasonably ready for the thundering flush. I don't know if anybody's ever totally ready for a grouse flush!

Try to plan these pauses in your progress so you're near a likely bit of cover where a bird could be hiding and where you can swing the gun freely and get a clean shot if one flushes. If the habitat looks appealing to grouse or you've flushed birds in that area before, stop every 75 to 100 feet. If you're with someone else, try mixing up the pauses, with one hunter stopping one time, the other the next, then occasionally both hunters at once. Keep visual contact with your partner when possible, so you'll know when they're pausing. Wearing the required blaze orange helps. Jump shooting grouse demands that you be quick in mounting the shotgun and firing. That's why a lightweight, short-barreled gun is necessary. There's no time for prolonged fancy technique. If you dally, the brown bird will vanish in the thickets. Keep the gun at port arms

position as much as possible. The minute you hear or see a bird getting up, raise the gun to your shoulder and prepare for the shot. If you can't see the bird or it's too far, you can always pull back.

Always be alert for a second or third grouse flushing. They don't hang in coveys like quail, but sometimes you'll flush two or three in a group. Also, watch the direction birds fly. Often they'll only go 100 or 200 yards and you can jump them again. Marking where birds you hit fall is extremely important. An occasional grouse may be lost without the aid of a dog, but such losses can be kept to a bare minimum by carefully watching where the bird goes down. I try to focus exactly on the spot where the bird fell and keep my eyes there until I pick up a prominent landmark, then walk directly to it. If a second grouse gets up before I've marked where the first bird fell, I don't try for it, concentrating instead on pinpointing the first one. If a grouse flushes *after* I mark the first one, then I may try for it and repeat the marking procedure.

Drop a shell so you can come back and realign where you shot from if necessary. If you're not sure whether the bird was hit, go to the last spot where you saw it and search diligently, assuming it may have been. Look in the surrounding area until you either find it or convince yourself it was a clean miss.

Certainly, no one should pass up the opportunity to hunt for grouse behind a crackerjack pointer, setter or Brittany. But if you don't own a bird dog, don't despair. Instead, put on some good walking boots and brush pants, grab a lightweight, open-choked shotgun and spend the day tromping through Virginia's game-rich mountains. I don't know of an any more absorbing way to spend a crisp winter afternoon. □

Gerald Almy has been a full-time outdoor writer for 17 years. He is currently a hunting and fishing editor on the staff of *Sports Afield* magazine.



The Perfect Hunter

Story and photos
by Carol Sipos

“**M**om, can I go ahead and shoot?” asked Joann in a whisper.

My answer was a quiet, “Yes, take your time and make your shot count.”

I watched as my youngest daughter brought the Winchester .30-.30 to her shoulder and sighted in on the doe, legal during this season. Watching the deer, I waited to hear the crack of the little rifle.

It was a good shot, but the deer immediately scrambled up the hillside and headed for the power line that was topside. With a light dusting of snow on the ground, following up on the deer was an easy task. I let Joann take the lead, and instructed her to be ready in case the deer was still on the move.

Tracking a little beyond the power line, the doe was lying beyond the edging of saplings and just inside a patch of brush. I knew the deer was hers, but cautioned Joann to be alert as she approached. We stood together and watched to make certain the doe was dead. I showed Joann the correct way

Teaching youngsters the skills involved in hunting, particularly safe handling of firearms and marksmanship, is a job to be taken seriously.

to approach the downed deer and how to safely determine that the deer could then be field dressed.

Before we got into that task, I congratulated Joann on taking her first deer. We both admired the deer and the placement of her shot and then got down to the business at hand.

I couldn't help but think back over the years to just how this entire day had finally happened. As any parent feels when their child embarks on a new experience, I was concerned and encouraged by both of my daughters' interest in the outdoors. We had shared many hikes, fishing trips, and outdoor activities when they were very young. The continuation into the sport of hunting was an easy and natural process with the girls.

When they were much younger and expressed an interest in shooting at the range, they already had received a lot of visual and verbal information

Above: Eye and ear protection are essential on shooting ranges, as is a comfortable shooting position.

about firearms. When I was cleaning guns, getting ready for trips to the range, and preparing for hunting excursions, we just naturally discussed the different guns. Step by step, according to the age and maturity of each girl, new material was introduced and learned.

It's not an easy or simple task to prepare a youngster for shooting and the natural interest that follows—hunting. It takes a lot of time, patience, and encouragement. The most important thing to remember is that you should *never* force a child into hunting if their heart isn't in it. Although you may feel that it would be absolutely wonderful to teach your child to enjoy the sport, there are some individuals who just never will be hunters. Let them enjoy the outdoors in their own way. Whether it's target shooting, fishing, hiking, or simply observing and absorbing nature, let them decide for themselves. If a youngster truly wants to hunt, they'll let you know about it!

What I've learned along the way and over the years in teaching my own eager children to shoot and hunt, how-

ever, should help you with the experience of teaching your own youngsters. A beginner probably won't be ready for this season, especially if they have a few years to fill in before they can take the hunter safety examination, but it's something to think about for future seasons.

You can start the learning process by spending time at home with your child explaining safe gun handling and how different firearms function. I started by just talking with the girls and explaining what I was doing while I cleaned various guns. I would remind them of the safety rules before I began and explained how the action, safety, and sights of that particular firearm worked. I took the time to show them what I was doing and why.

Let your youngster help with simple tasks, such as organizing cleaning equipment or cutting cleaning patches. You don't have to get extremely technical on terminology with very young children, but do stress the safety issue in terms that are very plain and straightforward. When you're explaining the rules of handling firearms to your child, make certain they understand their importance. Ask questions that provide you with a guide to gauge just what they have learned. Provide the basics and answer any questions they may have. If you don't know the answer, look it up and discuss your findings.

You know your child better than anyone else. Under direct supervision (and making certain they know this rule must *always* be followed), let them handle the empty firearm. Common sense dictates that the child must be mature enough before you consider this step in the process of firearms safety and instruction.

An important thing to remember is that children learn and repeat the practices of adults. All the safety rules in the world aren't going to help if you

comfortably are a must. Use sandbags and make certain the firearm is rested solidly. Before the shooting session begins, help your child find a shooting

position that is comfortable and correct for them. Feet flat, they should have a comfortable hold on the firearm with the last three fingers of the shooting hand pulling gently straight back so the rifle is not canted or twisted. A gentle but firm grip on the forearm will complete the bench shooting position.

If your child's body size is not compatible with the size of the shooting bench, you can remedy the situation in several ways. One method that I used was to note which benches at the range were sized slightly different and then tried these benches for the best fit. When there were no suitably sized benches, we had several choices to make the adjustments. One was a few magazines placed in a paper bag. With the bag folded over neatly and then secured with tape, a few inches could be added to the seat to bring the shooter's upper body midline with the top surface of the shooting table.

A wool blanket is also a good choice because it can be folded to the thickness needed to adjust the shooter's position to the bench. As a footrest, a solidly constructed box works very well. For a time, we used a square plastic milk carrier.

If you have the area to construct your own bench, or belong to a sportsman's club, it would be best to build a scaled-down bench for beginning shooters. It's well worth the effort because repetition of the correct shooting positions is the key to shooting accuracy. There are many techniques



Teaching youngsters to shoot should involve some fun at the end of the lesson, like plinking at balloons or lollipops attached to a target.

don't follow them one hundred percent yourself!

Before each of my girls was permitted to shoot a firearm on the range, she received instruction and supervision on handling and cleaning that individual firearm. This familiarity certainly helped a great deal. They also knew the details and features of their own .22's, which added enormously to their confidence and success at the range.

Begin your sessions at the range by making certain your youngster is prepared for the outing. Proper ear protection and shooting glasses that fit

and positions for shooting. Keep in mind that no matter which position is selected for shooting, your youngster should be comfortable but not rigid.

Adults judge their shooting skills by how tightly they can place a group. A youngster wants to see results. When you're teaching a youngster how to shoot, keep this in mind. Common sense dictates that we should start youngsters out with a small caliber, such as the .22. Keep a record of their paper targets. A great way is to simply date them, record the firearm and ammunition used, and place them in a three-ring binder. This method provides a visual record of their progress and can help pinpoint problems that possibly can be remedied.

The best method for shooting success is to teach your youngster self control and how to repeat the basics for continued improvement. Each shot is fired with the same sight picture, breath control, and trigger pull, regardless of the youngster's selected shooting position. These learned shooting skills will then carry over to field shooting and accuracy when hunting.

As mentioned earlier, a youngster likes to see results. Once the official paper target session is over, have a little fun. Through experience, each youngster will begin to recognize which methods work for them and will be able to concentrate on improving these skills. We've used balloons, paper cups, lollipops, and even bottle caps as targets at the range. The girls do shoot a lot more paper now that they're older, but the balloons are still fun for plinking!

When we selected their .22's, the individual size of the child helped determine exactly what rifle was selected. You don't make a child wear boots that are three sizes too big, and the same holds true with guns. For a fifth grade graduation gift, we selected a Winchester model 9422 for Jamie. It was just the right size for her. Joann, who is much smaller framed, started out with an Anschutz 'Woodchucker'. The rifle is scaled down and can be used as a single shot or you can fire up

to 10 rounds, depending on the clip size selected.

When I was a kid learning to shoot, my Dad did a trick that taught me a lot and showed him a problem area that most shooters don't even realize they have. I was shooting a Winchester .30-.30 at the time and the procedure we were using was that Dad would load three shells into it, hand it to me and I would proceed to shoot a group. To test for flinching, Dad placed only two shells in the rifle and handed it to me. It was a real surprise to discover how strong my reaction to the expected recoil showed up in how I was handling the rifle.

We worked on solving the problem by sessions of dry firing that helped eliminate this flaw in shooting live ammunition. I think any shooter honest enough to admit it would claim flinching as an occasional problem. At home, Dad's advice was to get a firearm out, make certain that it was empty and practice dry firing. I must have placed a thousand rounds or more at a deer that was on a tapestry above the sofa. Now, a Ned Smith turkey print is a select dry firing target.

The same holds true with the follow through necessary when shooting a shotgun. Although it's a little more involved and takes lots of practice as well, practicing the dry firing and follow through will show results.

Switching from open sights to a scope also requires practice sighting, so that getting the correct sight picture is a simple process of bringing the firearm to the proper position. This practice is important to success in the field. We still dry fire before we begin each shooting session; it's the perfect way to gain confidence over sight picture, trigger control, and flinching.

When your youngster is shooting groups, have him shoot a three to five shot string. Don't rush the process, but don't let them get up and move around during the string. Let them take a break between groups, and if you're shooting a larger caliber rifle, it'll give the barrel a chance to cool down.

During their first few deer seasons, Jamie used the Winchester Model 94 .30-.30. Joann used a Winchester Model 94 'Trapper' .30-.30. Again, try to suit the firearm to the individual youngster who will be using it.

Any beginning hunter has to spend time at the range, especially a youngster. You can't take them two or three times a year and expect them to be ready to hunt. It's a serious mistake, but I have seen it done. Make trips to the range an enjoyable time for your youngster. Don't try to compete with them when they're first learning; it's not a fair match. Let them compete against their own skills, so they can see the improvement. Range excursions should be often, fun, and educational without becoming an open forum to lecture your youngster on the qualities of one rifle over another.

My daughters never liked using the range when there were other shooters around, and neither do I. When there's a crowd, your concentration goes down because you know someone's watching. Make your trips to the range when you know you'll be able to devote your time to the practice session and not to a group of spectators.

A day or two prior to last hunting season, a father had his young son at the range. He explained, "The boy got his license and is going to hunt this year." This kid was a genuine hazard and was told, not so politely by a few folks using the range, to sit out at the car until the other folks had finished and left. This boy was not ready to be turned loose with a water gun, let alone a high-powered rifle!

Both daughters had a few years of experience around firearms, as well as at the range, when an opportunity came up to enroll them in a 10-week (three hours each session) safe gun handling course. I stayed to see just what material was being taught for this air rifle course. The material covered the basics of safe hunting practices, explained the difference between various firearms, and stressed gun safety rules.

The class also provided a few practice shoots prior to a written examination and a final shooting competition. I'm proud to say that both girls won first place trophies for their individual age divisions.

These classes were sponsored by an area service group and by watching the newspapers or inquiring around, such a class would provide an additional learning experience for your youngster.

Dress your kids in the required fluorescent orange and take them with you small game hunting. Let them see and experience what hunting is all about. Have them carry a BB gun, not for hunting, but to practice field safety in carrying a gun.

When they were younger, I'd take both girls along for small game and deer seasons as well. Jamie was eight or nine for her first trip out. We walked down the railroad tracks to the bottom where I planned to hunt. Once in awhile, I'd look back to check on her and I caught her placing a little stone on the rail. I asked her what she was doing and she replied, "I'm marking our trail so we don't get lost on the way back."

Make sure your youngster is comfortably dressed to suit the weather conditions. Give a trial run occasionally on their boots and gear to make sure everything still fits. Nothing spoils a day like being too cold or having sore feet.

You have to show by experience how to find game. Show by example how to be quiet and motionless on a stand. A youngster doesn't have the patience, experience, or body weight to last any great length of time on a stand during severe weather conditions. Keep this in mind when you're starting your youngsters out in the sport of hunting. Expect and plan for a few exercise breaks. Take a walk back to the vehicle for a hot drink or just to let them exercise a little. It'll put a cramp in your personal hunting style, but it sure relieves a lot of irritation, and the hunting may be a little better when you return to your stand. The time spent

with your child is well worth it.

I never plan on seeing much game activity when I'm hunting with a youngster. The first year or two out, you'll understand exactly what I mean. Believe me, it does get better. Last year Jamie and I stood together on the first day and counted 27 does that approached our position.

You can't just turn a youngster loose in the woods. For one thing, it's against the law. For another, it's good common sense to keep them right beside you, in the literal sense. You have to keep in mind the excitability of youth. They're out there with a license and a rifle in their hands. Any game they see is going to charge them up, no matter how many times you've explained that being calm and steady is vital to hunting safety as well as hunting success.

I also made it a strict rule during these early years of hunting that they could not shoot at anything until I gave them my personal okay. This rule may have resulted in missed opportunities, but that's just how it was. It may seem to be a cruel rule at first glance. Your child is properly trained, and they know what the results of pulling the trigger can do. But . . . never having hunted before means that when they see a deer, the excitement begins. It may be a deer, but they must also be able to judge if it's legal. Antlered or non-antlered? Is the field of fire safe? What's beyond the target? A youngster may forget everything you've taught in the excitement of the moment. I've known some adults who do the exact same thing, yet they would be the last to admit it.

During a doe season early in her hunting experience, Jamie was hunting with her father. She had a safe, clear shot at a doe that was within 40 yards. She got the 'go ahead' from her dad and was ready for action. She raised up the rifle, sighted the doe, and the gun wouldn't go off! The problem? She had forgotten to pull the hammer of the .30-.30 back.

Needless to say, the deer was long gone and she learned a good lesson. It

showed me that my judgment had been correct in setting the rules and guidelines for hunting with my kids. When you're dealing with firearms, you must supervise your youngsters in the process that turns them into responsible, ethical, and enjoyable hunting partners.

This past buck season Jamie was seventeen and could legally hunt on her own. She was using a Remington Model Seven 7mm .08 equipped with a Weaver K 2-5. After spending years with her while she was getting started, I knew that she was, indeed, ready to be hunting by herself. The fact that she had never taken a deer yet prompted me to have her stand in an area that was within shouting distance from where Joann and I were located. I had instructed her that if she got shooting and brought down a deer to give me a yell and I'd be there shortly.

Around 10:30 that morning, she did take a buck. A nice three point . . . and I had no trouble hearing, "Hey, Mom!!!" As she was waiting with her deer at the truck she later told me what she was thinking. "You know, Mom," she explained. "At first I kind of felt a little disappointed that it was only a three point. And the more I looked at the buck, the more I felt thankful that it gave up its life to me. It's a beautiful animal, no matter what size the rack is!"

It sounds like another true hunter has recently joined our ranks, doesn't it? It's a step by step process and I'm very glad that I'm sharing it with both of my children.

You have to be more than willing to surrender your chances at a buck to get your kids started out on the way to becoming safe, successful, and ethical hunters. The time wisely invested now will give us many pleasant and safe hunting seasons for the future. It can also give you and your child a valuable experience that will grow into an enjoyable way of life in your years together as competent shooters and safe, ethical hunters. □

Carol Sipos is a freelance outdoor writer living in Pennsylvania.

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Don't Blow Your Money on Deer Whistles!



Deer whistle mounted on fender; photo by Lee Walker.

by Bob Duncan

Damage done by deer in collisions with motor vehicles is serious both in terms of the financial damage and in terms of human injury and loss of life. Based on accident data compiled by the Virginia Department of Transportation for 1987, an estimated \$3,710,261 of property damage resulted from deer vehicle collisions. In that same year, 214 persons were injured in 186 accidents involving personal injury. An additional 2,762 deer-related accidents resulted in property damage only, for a total of 2,948 deer-vehicle accidents reported in 1987.

While the problem of deer-vehicle collisions is serious, some of the solutions offered to the driving public have been anything but that. Recently, I was contacted by a major Virginia insurance company and asked about the effectiveness of deer whistles in reducing deer-vehicle crashes. Although I had previously requested scientific evidence from at least one manufacturer/distributor of deer whistles who had contacted me, no such information was ever forthcoming and like most other fish and wildlife agency personnel, I had my doubts.

Fortunately, some researchers in Georgia were able to produce some evidence on the effectiveness of these devices. According to advertising

claims, the whistles, when mounted on a vehicle traveling 30 mph or more, produce a sound in the 15-20 kHz range that frightens deer, but cannot be heard by the human ear. Reporting at a recent Southeastern deer study group meeting, the Georgia researchers concluded that deer whistles simply do not work. Interestingly enough, the investigators found that the whistles failed to produce any sound, ultrasonic or otherwise, when the test vehicles on which the whistles were mounted were driven at speeds up to 55 mph. Previous work at the University of Georgia revealed that white-tailed deer cannot hear frequencies significantly above those which a human can detect.



Five Georgia Department of Natural Resources employees installed deer whistles on their vehicles and over a period of several months were unable to identify any responses by deer or other animals attributable to the "whistles." In addition, one of the Georgia researches noted four vehicles with whistles awaiting deer crash damage repairs at a local auto body shop. Also reported was the story of one Georgia driver, who, after hitting a deer in July, installed a deer whistle and proceeded to hit two additional deer in the month of August.

Other methods have been tried in attempts to reduce the risk of deer-vehicle collisions and these have included warning signs ("deer crossings"), fence-

ing and even special reflectors designed to alarm deer with flashes of light reflecting from oncoming headlights. The placement of salt, an attraction for deer, and the planting of preferred foods have been tried in efforts to divert deer from roadways and thus reduce the chance for collisions. However, none of these solutions have proven successful on a large-scale basis.

When it comes to avoiding deer-vehicle collisions, the old axiom of "the best defense is a good offense" simply does not apply! The best defense to avoid "hitting a deer" with your car is defensive driving. If you see deer alongside a roadway, you should anticipate that they will dart out in front of you. Unfortunately, some drivers seem to wrongly assume that deer will simply run from a vehicle, and that there is no cause for concern or need to slow down. Another point to keep in mind is that oftentimes more than one deer will cross the road in succession. Even if you observe a deer crossing in front of your vehicle, you should anticipate that other deer may follow.

I recall approaching a deer standing broadside in the middle of a Y-intersection on a rural roadway in Hanover County one night. The very first thing I saw was the reflection of an eye, but surprisingly the position of the eye was very close to the ground. As I slowed my vehicle down to just a few

The number of motorists crashing into deer darting out in front of them is on the rise in the state. But, don't be fooled into believing that some fancy gizmo you attach to your car is going to scare deer away, and prevent an accident. It won't!

miles per hour, I continued to approach the animal in the road. At that point, the deer raised its head. It had been standing with its nose to the ground and it reluctantly moved on

across the road into a field on the opposite side of the road. Just as I started to resume my speed, a second deer jumped in front of my car just a few feet away from the bumper. Fortunately, since the car was all but stopped, all that resulted was a close call and not another deer-vehicle accident.

A special study of miscellaneous deer mortality, conducted by recently retired Research Biologist Jack Gwynn, found that there is a noted increase in deer accidents and losses starting in September, peaking in November and carrying through the month of January. This seasonal peak in the deer-vehicle accidents coincides not only with maximum deer numbers, but also the onset of the deer breeding season or rut. Because of deer movements associated with the rut and with disturbance by hunters and hunting dogs, deer are more likely to encounter hazards such as vehicles.

In addition to the above, consider the following general factors which contribute to the number of deer-vehicle collisions in Virginia: According to data contained in the 1987 edition of the *Virginia Statistical Abstracts*, there are more than 65,000 miles of public roads and streets in the Old Dominion. There are more than four million motor vehicles registered (not counting out-of-state traffic) and nearly the same number of licensed drivers. White-tailed deer are found in every county and in most cases within the city limits of our larger urban areas. Several years ago, we actually had a deer killed by a vehicle in front of the Department's headquarters at 4010 West Broad Street in Richmond. Estimates of the deer population prior to the hunting season place the number of whitetails in the Commonwealth at 850,000.

Hopefully, you will never be involved in a deer-vehicle collision. However, if you are, please remember that you are required by law to report the accident immediately to a game warden or other law enforcement officer in the county or city where the accident occurred. □

Bob Duncan is chief of the Department's Wildlife Division.



Every year, the chapters of Quail Unlimited come to the rescue of wildlife in the state by assisting the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries in various habitat improvement projects. Not only do these folks volunteer their funds, but many donate equipment, time, and hard, backbreaking work.

by
Patty Knupp
and Pat Keyser

While many people in Virginia are still wondering where all our bobwhites have gone, at least one group in the state is trying to do something about it. Over the past eight years, Quail Unlimited, a national, nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to the preservation and reestablishment of crucial upland game bird habitat, has been involved in a countless number of habitat projects across the state in cooperation with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF).

In a word, these folks seem to have one idea about where our quail have gone: fescue! In Virginia, one of the biggest problems we have in terms of

small game habitat is the dominance of much of our open land by fescue hay and pasture land. While an adequate cool-season livestock forage, fescue is absolutely terrible as nesting, brood-rearing, escape, feeding or winter cover for either quail or rabbits.

Since fescue first came on the scene here in Virginia in the latter part of the 1950s, neither sportsmen nor biologists could do much about the situation; that is, until now. Biologists



from VDGIF have teamed up with local chapters of Quail Unlimited and begun the process of reintroducing native warm season grasses into the Old Dominion.

Warm season grasses are a group of native grasses that once produced excellent forage and wildlife habitat in Virginia, until the plow, overgrazing and fire protection reduced their role in the landscape. Today, they are still the backbone of the Great Plains

rangelands—adapted as they are to low rainfall.

In Virginia, warm season grasses such as big and little bluestem, indian-grass, switchgrass, and eastern gamma-grass hold a lot of promise for both quail and cattle. Outstanding forage producers during the summer months (when fescue is not producing), these grasses provide excellent cover year-round for small game.

To help promote the use of these grasses among the state's livestock producers, Quail Unlimited bore all the considerable costs of planting this past year to help VDGIF develop a series of demonstration farms. Thus far, farms in Amelia, Halifax, and one on the Prince Edward-Nottoway line have hay fields and pastures planted to warm season grasses. VDGIF biologists and the South Central Chapter of Quail Unlimited from Clarksville have also drawn up plans for a demonstration farm in Mecklenburg County next spring.

In addition to exhibiting the viability of warm season grasses, these "demo" farms show various management techniques that a landowner/farmer can implement on his or her farm that will improve wildlife habitat and benefit the farmer as well. Prescribed burning, controlled grazing, low-density pine plantations, and nesting food patch plantings are some of the practices showcased.

Not content to stop with their support of these demo farms, the Central Virginia chapter of Quail Unlimited responded to a call for help from the Game Department by donating \$9,100 toward the \$10,100 price tag on a Tye, no-till drill. Of the warm season grasses mentioned above, switchgrass and eastern gammagrass are the only two which can be planted using your "everyday" grain drill. The other seeds will not pass through a regular drill box because they are fluffy or chaffy seeds (looking similar to mouse nests). Therefore, a specially designed drill is necessary for planting this seed. The new Tye drill is outfitted with a native grass seed box equipped with

agitators and picker wheels to specifically handle the fluffy seed. This drill will be available next spring to landowners to help them establish these valuable grasses on their properties at a nominal per acre fee.

Also, in an effort to continue educating landowners on the benefits of warm season grasses, the James River, Rappahannock Valley, and Shenandoah Valley chapters of Quail Unlimited, in cooperation with VDGIF, hosted three Warm Season Native Grass Workshops in August for landowners in Harrisonburg, Orange, and Rustburg. During the morning sessions of the workshops, professionals familiarized landowners and biologists with warm season grass identification, establishment and management. In the afternoon, participants visited local farms to see the grasses firsthand.

Back in the piedmont and Northern Neck, the Central Virginia chapter once again braved Virginia's nasty winter weather and made their annual seeding pilgrimage into burned over areas on timber company properties



The James River, Rappahannock Valley and Shenandoah Valley chapters of Quail Unlimited in cooperation with VDGIF hosted three Warm Season Native Grass Workshops last summer to introduce landowners to the wildlife and ranching benefits of warm season grasses; photo by Patty Knupp.

last year. According to President Bob Talbert, the group has been seeding timber company lands which are available for public hunting for the past seven years.

"Around the 1st of December, I

A prescribed burn is one wildlife management technique the Monticello Chapter of Quail Unlimited and VDGIF used to set fields back to early succession and good quail habitat on the Hardware River Wildlife Management Area this year; photo by Mike Fies.



A Tye, no-till drill, necessary for the effective planting of many warm season grasses, was donated to VDGIF by the Central Virginia Chapter of Quail Unlimited this year; photo by Steve Capel.



The bobwhite (right; photo by Lloyd B. Hill) has long been associated with small, overgrown fields-which Virginia was full of 60 or 70 years ago (far right; photo by Dwight Dyke). Today, small fields with weedy or overgrown borders have given way to huge "deserts" of pesticide and herbicide laced fields devoid of diversity-and quail. Quail Unlimited is determined to help change that.



write letters to all the timber companies in our region," he said. "They send me maps of burned-over areas that will be open to the public for hunting. We'll get our members out on Saturdays in January, February and March and plant Korean lespedeza in these patches. Last year, we planted about 4500 lbs. of lespedeza."

This past spring, the group donated annual lespedeza seed for the second year in a row, and assisted in sowing the seed over some 500 acres in the Cumberland State Forest. The chapter sowed another mixture of lespedeza, wheat and clover in scattered patches totalling 30 acres. These different herbaceous plantings will provide



quail with "bugging" or brood rearing areas as well as serve as an additional source of food, especially during a



severe winter.

Pursuing the need for winter wildlife cover, the Rappahannock Val-

ley chapter of Quail Unlimited constructed approximately 1600 feet of "psuedo" fencerows at Pettigrew

Wildlife Management Area in Caroline County. Sixteen hardworking volunteers fabricated the fencerows, with the use of posts, high tensile wire, baling twine, and honeysuckle vines. Once fully established, these fencerows will provide winter cover, travel lanes, and escape cover for small game and other wildlife.

The Rappahannock group also braved the cold and rain of a March weekend to plant 1,000 VA-70 lespedeza and 1,000 white pine seedlings and approximately 12 acres of a mixture of Korean lespedeza, partridge pea, and oats—and they did it all in one day! Chuck McCormack, a chapter member and owner of Rappahannock Construction Company, donated three days of his time and several of his employees, along with his track loader and bulldozer to construct additional fencerows out of windrows, build brush piles, and berm unneeded access roads to control public access as well as to clean off several areas of parking lots at Pettigrew.

And, according to President Bobby Pittman, the Rappahannock chapter isn't resting of its laurels. It's already planning a warm season grass experiment on a private farm in cooperation with VDGIF come spring.

The Blue Ridge chapter out of Warrenton helped VDGIF managers improve upland game bird habitat for the third year in a row. They provided equipment and manpower to work up about 100 acres on the Chester F. Phelps Wildlife Management Area in Fauquier County and plant around 50 acres in grain sorghum, sunflowers, and corn—again, all in one day! This chapter comes well-equipped to do the job with five tractors and plenty of volunteers to assist with clearing fields of invading trees, hand-sowing annual lespedeza and planting VA-70 lespedeza seedlings. Indeed, they were recently honored by the Virginia Chapter of the Wildlife Society with the 1991 Citizens Award for their outstanding contributions to the wise management of wildlife resources of Virginia.

Sometimes, new chapters are a little cautious and slow about becoming involved in local projects. This is not the case with the new Monticello Chapter in Charlottesville. Chapter members have been active on the Hardware River Wildlife Management Area in Fluvanna County, where they assisted VDGIF in planting 17 different species of shrubs in a field border. This field border will provide wildlife with food as well as nesting, escape and winter cover. The members also participated in a prescribed burn to set fields back to early succession which is critical for quail, and improved the habitat on the area by planting quail and dove fields with sunflower and sorghum. Additionally, disc plots were created (again to set back succession) and edge was developed by felling trees.

The Hampton Roads chapter established a plant material demonstration site at Portsmouth using 17 different shrub species and seven species of warm season grasses and legumes. Chapter members worked up the ground and then used planting bars to plant over 1,000 seedlings.

There is no doubt that wildlife in Virginia is faring better due to the efforts of groups like Quail Unlimited. Yes, these are sportsmen's group, composed mostly of hunters who put their money and their muscles where their mouths are when it comes to talking wildlife conservation.

"Yes, we're 95 percent hunters," says Bob Talbert. "But I believe I speak for all of us when I say that if we could bring back three bobwhites for every one we take, we'd be happy."

This year, Talbert's chapter cleared \$12,000 from their annual banquet. Says Talbert: "Now we'll go to the Game Department and ask, 'What else do you need? What else can we do?'"

That's what Quail Unlimited is all about. □

Patty Knupp is the farm/quail wildlife biologist for VDGIF. Pat Keyser is the wildlife biologist supervisor in the Southside for VDGIF.

Field Borders



Photo by Dwight Dyke

Well-established field borders are wonderful places for wildlife. Some animals are full-time residents of field borders. To others, field borders are temporary havens for loafing, nesting, escape from enemies, or for riding out a storm. A field border can also serve as a pantry, since the most desirable types of border plants—shrubs, brambles, and vines—are often abundant food producers.

Field borders or "edge" is often the main ingredient lacking on "well-kept" farms. Cover typically goes from a crop field or fescue pasture immediately to woodland with no "soft" border. Borders of VA-70 lespedeza, silky

dogwood, crabapple or some other shrub or mixture of shrubs provide good cover and food around the edges of fields or along woods roads. Shrubs, weeds, grasses and/or legumes can provide edge, but usually shrubs offer better diversity for more species of wildlife.

Field borders can be established by planting shrubs and/or herbaceous materials or by allowing natural plant succession to encroach into the edge of existing fields or other openings. Borders should be at least 30-40' wide. Few management practices offer wildlife more than well-located, well-established edges.

For more information:

Virginia Quail Unlimited
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Blue Ridge, Warrenton:

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Central Virginia, Richmond:

Bob Talbert (804) 276-7018

Hampton Roads, Suffolk:

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Arnold Prillman (703) 632-6849

Southside, Blackstone:

Claude Tomlison (804) 696-2966

Southwest Virginia, Glade Spring:

(703) 944-5057

If you are interested in starting a new chapter in your locale, please contact Donnie Buckland, Regional Director, at (703) 694-6979.

LOOKING BACK



*Virginia Department of Game and
Inland Fisheries memories...
75 years of fish
and wildlife conservation...*

In the early days, we were in the business of raising game fish to catchable size and keeping them healthy once they were released into the streams, ponds, reservoirs and rivers of the state. It was a time when everyone was a rookie. According to Jack Hoffman, retired Chief of the Fish Division who started work in 1955, "We got into a lot of public fishing lakes management techniques then, some of which didn't pan out, but it was all new to everybody." They learned by doing, and because there weren't any mail-order catalogs for fish sampling equipment, they had to be inventors as well. Says Hoffman: "You had to make everything you used outside of the laboratory."



Top: 1960s-Bob Martin, then Fish Division Chief releasing a trophy largemouth bass into a pond; photo by L.G. Kesteloo.
Bottom: 1940s-The former Wytheville National Fish Hatchery, second hatchery of its kind in the U.S. Here, men transfer fry to buckets for stocking.

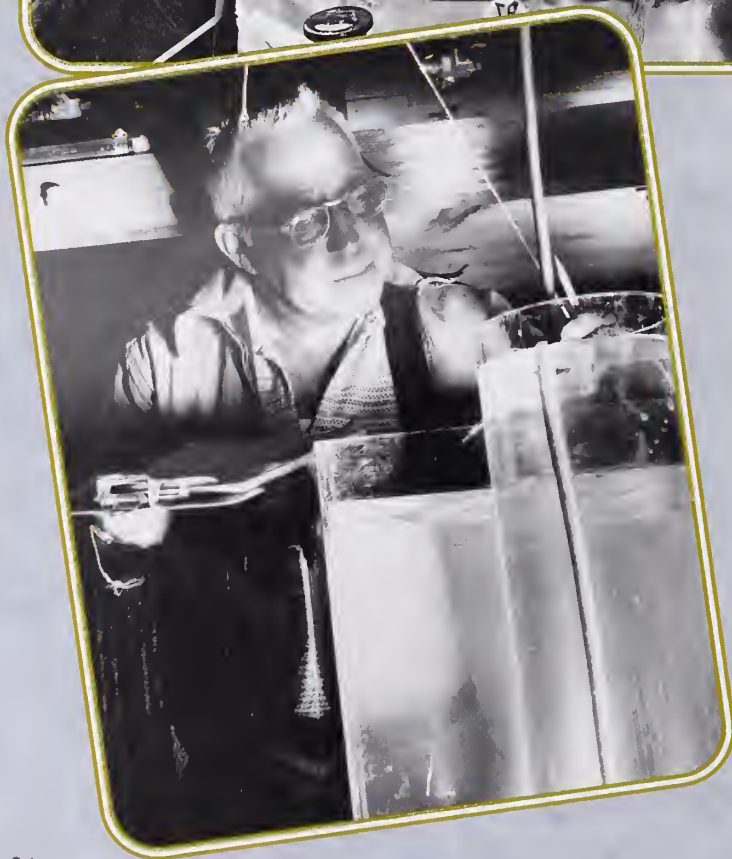


Above: 1960s- Bob Wollitz (left) and Joe Bellamy (right) taking water quality samples; photo by L.G. Kesteloo.

Left: 1963- Robert Brooks, Front Royal Fish Hatchery Manager checking walleye or musky egg jars; photo by L.G. Kesteloo.

Above right: Paul Frye (left) and Jack Hoffman (right) check fish placed in fish boxes on the Shenandoah River during the 1956 fish kill by Viscos rayon plant.

Right: The 1956 Viscos fish kill on the Shenandoah River had our biologists electroshocking to examine damage to fish.





1956 VISCOS FISH KILL



In 1956, the Viscos plant in Front Royal caused the fourth in a series of major fish kills by discharging toxic chemicals into the Shenandoah River. Our fisheries biologists were on-site, testing the waters, and assessing the effects on the fish. They found that fish were being killed for 100 miles below the discharge point, and as a result of the investigation, the final settlement was the largest one ever recorded at the time. Unfortunately, the rayon plant continued to poison the waters of the Shenandoah for 33 more years until 1989 when the company, then called Avtex, was shut down by the Environmental Protection Agency.

It's a little-known fact that long before the birth of the Water Control Board and the Environmental Protection Agency, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries was the sole caretaker of the state's waterways. As early as the 1920s, then chairman of VDGIF A. Willis Robertson submitted bills to the General Assembly year after year to control the rampant pollution of our rivers and streams. He failed, but that did not keep him or his biologists from fighting the outrage.



The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries has grown up in 75 years of conserving the fish and wildlife of this state. We have learned that stocking fry is a better management practice for establishing populations than raising the fry to catchable-sized adults, and we learned that draining a lake is not the only way to go about improving fishing for anglers. We've learned how to care for the species in our waters other than the ones that people like to catch, and our expertise at hatchery operations has proved invaluable in helping to save failing populations, like striped bass in the Bay. But, through it all, we have never strayed from our goal as stewards of the life found in our state's inland waterways. We are the watchdogs and the caretakers of our charges, and we continue to be.



Top: Lake draining was a popular fisheries management tool in the 60s to improve fishing in public lakes. Here, at Bark Camp Lake (then Scott-Wise Lake), the game fish were held in the military water reservoir tanks for restocking while the lake was drained; photo by L.G. Kesteloo.

Above: We have stocked catchable-sized trout in Virginia since the late 1920s. In the 60s, the techniques for stocking were much the same—they required lots of muscle and lots of help; photo by L.G. Kesteloo.

Journal



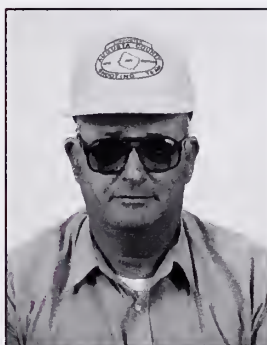
Bob Duncan (r.) and Betsy Stinson (l.) received VWF award from VDGIF Director Bud Bristow

VDGIF Biologists Receive Top VWF Award

Bob Duncan, Chief of Wildlife Division, and Wildlife Biologist Betsy Stinson were honored with the highest award presented by the Virginia Wildlife Federation (VWF) this year for their work to ban the pesticide carbofuran in Virginia. According to VWF, Duncan and Stinson were chosen for the award because, "in the opinion of the Awards Committee, Bob Duncan and Betsy Stinson went above and beyond the call of duty to press for the elimination of the pesticide carbofuran from Virginia's environment. When, through an eleventh hour negotiation, the manufacturer of carbofuran avoided a ban on their product by implementing a so-called risk-reduction program, Bob Duncan and Betsy Stinson organized a field monitoring program which proved that risk-reduction efforts were totally ineffective where the chemical carbofuran is concerned. Often sacrificing evening and weekend hours, Betsy Stinson and her team of monitors scoured fields to which carbofuran had been applied, and discovered bird kills in 100% of the fields studied. Armed with this information, Bob Duncan skillfully picked his way through the political minefield to convince decision makers that this deadly chemical had to go.

"In large part due to the efforts of our award winners," continued VWF, "the Virginia Pesticide Control Board enacted an emergency ban on this product in June of this year. Within three days of the announcement of this ban, the Environmental Protection Agency announced that carbofuran would be withdrawn from all U.S. markets over the next three years.

Were it not for the efforts of these two outstanding professionals, this deadly product would have continued to devastate bird populations in Virginia and across the nation. Their efforts serve as a shining example to other professionals in both the public and private sector. Their commitment and perseverance serve as examples to us all." □



George's Special Venison Recipes

George Wheeler of Waynesboro, hunter education instructor and deer hunter, graciously gave *Virginia Wildlife* two prized recipes for venison jerky and salami to share with our readers. These should keep the hunters in your family from going hungry in the woods. Thanks, George!

Venison Salami

5 lbs. lean ground venison
4 tbsp. Morton Tender Quick Core Salt
2-1/2 tsp. liquid smoke
1 tsp. garlic powder
2-1/2 tsp. mustard seed

2-1/2 tsp. coarse ground black pepper

2 tbsp. Tabasco (if desired)

Mix together in a bowl and refrigerate. Knead 5 minutes each day for four days. On the fourth day, make four loaves (two inches in diameter, 1 and 1/4 lbs. each). Bake on cookie sheet (or broiler pan to catch grease) at 160 degrees for 9 hours.

Oven Dried Venison Jerky

1-1/2 to 2 lbs. partially frozen boneless venison (when butchering your deer deboning it at the same time will make it easier to make jerky later on)

1/4 cup soy sauce

1 tbsp. Worcestershire sauce

1/4 tsp. black pepper

1/4 tsp. garlic powder

1/2 tsp. onion powder

1 tsp. hickory smoke flavoring

2 tbsp. Tabasco sauce (1 tbsp. Spicy, 2 tbsp. Hot, 3 tbsp. HOTTER!)

1 tbsp. salt

Trim and discard all fat from meat (it becomes rancid quickly). Cut the meat in 1/8 to 1/4-inch thick slices (with or across the grain). If necessary, cut large slices to make strips about 1 and 1/2 inches wide and as long as possible.

In a bowl, combine the soy sauce, Worcestershire sauce, pepper, garlic powder, onion powder, and smoke flavoring. Stir until all seasonings are dissolved. Add meat strips and mix to thoroughly coat all surfaces. The meat will absorb most of the liquid. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

Shake off excess liquid. Arrange strips of meat close but not overlapping directly on oven racks or on cake racks set in shallow pans.

Dry meat at lowest possible oven temperature (150-200 degrees) until it turns brown, and feels dry to the touch. This should take about 4-7 hours. Pat off beads of oil. Let cool, remove from racks and store airtight in plastic bags or in a jar with a tight-fitting lid. (continued on next page)

(continued from page 27)

Keep at cool room temperature or in refrigerator until ready to use. Makes about 1/2 pound. (This recipe can be used for lean cuts of beef or the white meat of turkey and chicken, too!)

Germantown Lake Map Available

A Germantown Lake map and fishing guide, produced by the staff at C. M. Crockett Park, is now available to the public for 99¢. This is the first comprehensive, detailed map of the man-made lake, fishing structures and adjacent recreation areas. Maps may be purchased at the concessions/offices of Crockett Park in Midland, VA or by sending a check/money order for 99¢ made out to C. M. Crockett Park to: C. M. Crockett Park, Topo Map, P.O. Box 239, Midland, VA 22728. □

Outdoor Films and Videos Available

The Outdoor Writers Association of America (OWAA) has a brochure available describing 28 outstanding outdoor films and videos for rent or sale. Titles include "Advanced Bassin' Today," "The Wilderness Idea: John Muir, Gifford Pinchot and the First Great Battle for Wilderness," and "America's Wild Turkey." All listings were outstanding winners and nominees from the North American Outdoor Film/Video Awards 1990-91, and are recommended to everyone interested in outdoor recreation and conservation. For a free brochure, write to OWAA, 2017 Cato Avenue, Suite 101, State College, PA 16801-2798. Please include a self-addressed stamped envelope. □

New Records Book From Boone and Crockett

The Boone and Crockett Club, recognized as the authority on native big game species in North America, announced the release of a new book, *Records of North American Elk and Mule Deer* and a companion book, the second edition of *Records of North American Whitetail Deer*.

The new 272-page elk and mule deer book lists over 1,800 trophies and provides all-time rankings plus state and provincial ratings for these two most popular western game animals.

The Club responded to requests by hunters asking for this information to help determine the very best locations for elk and mule deer, according to editor Wm. H. Nesbitt. It will be a valuable aid to sportsmen and women planning western hunting trips.

The book provides accurate data on exceptional trophies, names of successful hunters and information on the year taken.

Records of North American Elk and Mule Deer also features the new category of non-typical American elk including locations. The book features 84 photographs for all typical and non-typical categories. These include American and Roosevelt's elk, mule deer, Columbia blacktail and Alaska's sitka blacktail deer.

The new, second edition of *Records of North American Whitetail Deer* lists over 600 new entries, covers typical and non-typical Coues' deer for the first time and features 114 photographs of all state and provincial records.

This volume lists 2,121 trophies with state-by-state and provincial information of America's most populous big game animal. Hunters can determine the quality of deer by area and also find those locations that produced outstanding recent records book entries.

The 320-page whitetail publication includes official score charts so readers may score their own trophies.

Trophy entries for all categories have increased substantially in the past 10 years, according to the Club. During a recent three-year period, the Club accepted over 1,900 trophies compared to 900 entries just a decade ago.

The new books cost \$14.95 each plus \$3.00 shipping and handling. Prices increase to \$16.95 each after 1 January 1992. Order directly from the Boone and Crockett Club, 241 South Fraley Blvd., Dumfries, VA 22026.

Call 703/221-1888 for credit card purchases (only Visa or MasterCard accepted). □

Letters

Bluebird Goodies

We have just received the October issue of *Virginia Wildlife* and read it from cover to cover as usual.

Margy Smith of Bluefield, West Virginia would like a recipe for bluebird mix. I use the following bluebird mix all the time—40 varieties of other birds love it too. Put this in suet feeders and hang it on a limb.

Bluebird Mix

4 cups white or yellow corn meal
1 cup white plain flour
1 cup lard or vegetable shortening
1 cup chunky or plain peanut butter

Put in big bowl and mix by hand to form a ball-like pie dough. Store in a plastic container. I use this recipe all year. Makes about two pounds.

Jean H. Darden
Franklin

In response to your bluebird food request in the October issue, here is a recipe from the book *My Recipes Are For The Birds*, by Irene Cisgrove, Doubleday. The only problem I have is saving it for the birds, it's so good.

Bluebird Betty

1 cup sugar
1 cup raisins
1/2 cup shortening
1/2 cup water
2 cups flour
1/2 tsp baking powder
1 tsp. baking soda
1/2 cup nutmeat

In a medium sized bowl put flour, baking powder, and soda. Set aside. Boil sugar, raisins, shortening, and water for 5 minutes. Add to dry ingredients. Mix well. Add nuts. Spoon into well greased 8 x 8 cake pan. Bake 20-25 minutes at 350 degrees. Serve in pieces on feeder tray.

Also in the book are Chickadee Crunch, Junco Jambalaya, Nuthatch Nibble, etc.

Rose Campbell
Gloucester

Here are my hints for the lady in West Virginia on feeding bluebirds: I feed currants and small pieces of

raisins. You don't have to cut the currants. I also pull dogwood berries in early fall before a hard frost, keep in refrigerator and feed them during the winter.

Jimmy S. Doyle
Martinsville

Kudos for Bill Cochran

I have just finished Bill Cochran's article, "Notes from Red Lick" in the October issue. It is one of the finest pieces of wildlife writing, any writing, that I've had the pleasure of reading in some time. It captures the essence of family roots as well as the love of land and wildlife that so many of us in Virginia cherish.

I don't know if individual articles are given awards, but I certainly would like to see Bill receive one.

W. D. Clarkson, M.D.
Salem

Thank You

You guys (no offense intended ma'am) have got to cut it out!

I come in late from work wanting to just hit the sack, and there on the counter lies that darned *Virginia Wildlife* magazine that has arrived that day. This means I have to get a glass of milk and stay up even later to read the blasted thing! Can't you make it less beautiful, informative and interesting? Please stop!!

P.S. Take a word of this seriously and change one thing, and I'll whip you all senseless with my flyrod!

I'm enchanted by your magazine—congratulations on a true work of art!

Dennis Mann
Richmond

Please start my subscription to your fine magazine.

I enjoyed the professional writing and accurate information as well as the beautiful format. We were subscribers until 1989 when we went overseas.

William L. Braddy
Burke



photo by Tim Wright

A Sporting Christmas Gift

Why not give a Sporting Clays Gift Certificate for Christmas? Give the shotgun enthusiast in your family a certificate for one round of sporting clays at the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' sporting clays range at Amelia Wildlife Management Area. The 11 clay target shooting stations at the range test the skills of the hunter in various hunting simulated situations, from ducks to quail to doves and rabbits. It's the shooting sport of the 90s and it's great fun!

Send your check for \$20 for an adult gift certificate, or \$10 for a youth certificate made out to the Treasurer of Virginia and send it to Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Attn: Sporting Clays, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104. *Note:* Reservations are required and will be made on a first-come, first-served basis. To make a reservation, call the Game Department at 804/367-8464 or 804/367-1000.

Photo Tips

Bundle Up For Cold Weather Photography

by Lynda Richardson

The pink sky brightened as hundreds of ducks slowly made their way toward me in the frosty morning air. Some swam bumping icy bits of river in their path while others dove and splashed about, glassy beads skidding off their backs. Naturally insulated by layers of down and feathers, these little feathery furnaces seemed to enjoy the bitter cold.

I had waited in my blind since an hour before dawn. During that time, my long hair had escaped a protective wool cap and had frozen to the shoulders of my goosedown jacket. It was so cold that it hurt to breathe the icy air. But, like the ducks, I was toasty and content in my warm layers of protection against the elements.

There is nothing worse than freezing your tail off in a blind for hours on end. Drawing on past years of duck and goose hunting with my dad as well as many frozen moments photographing wildlife, I've learned a few things that help make photographing wildlife in cold weather a more pleasurable experience.

The secret to staying warm in winter is wearing clothes in layers. I start with a layer of soft polypropylene underwear. Polypropylene underwear comes in several weights and styles. I wear the turtleneck top and full length bottoms. I cover my feet and hands with the same material in the form of socks and glove liners.

For the next layer, I'll start with the feet and work up. I cover my toes with wool "ragg," Thermax or Gore-Tex boot socks. Depending on how much walking I have to do or if I'll be in a wet area, I wear sturdy heavy or light, waterproof, hiking boots. A recent discovery passed on to me by fellow wildlife photographer Mark Degan, was PolarGuard booties or Insulated Boot Blankets. Once I settle in at a blind, I remove my hiking boots and plunge socked feet into these soft, warm,

booties. It makes a *dramatic* difference in staying warm in your blind and I'd recommend everyone getting a pair!

When choosing pants, you are looking for something that will cut the wind, is waterproof and will retain heat. And I wear different types of pants depending on the temperature and whether I'm walking or sitting. Heavy wool pants are perfect for partic-



Red noses are hard to avoid in cold weather, but by preparing properly you can enjoy wildlife photography this winter; photo by Tim Wright.

ularly cold weather and sitting in blinds. I use the army surplus 85% wool, 15% polyester pants made in West Germany. Other types of pants I might wear are Nylon Faced Upland Field Pants. These are great for walking and you usually can find them in women's sizes! If wind or rain is a problem, I might add Gore-Tex rain pants.

It's very important to keep your upper body warm as this is where all your internal organs reside. On top of a polypropylene turtleneck, I usually wear another turtleneck of cotton blend and then a heavy wool sweater. My favorite sweaters are the Commando-style which have elbow and shoulder patches and are made of 100% wool. For the final upper body covering, I once again choose on the basis of weather, temperature and sitting or walking. Goose down jackets are great for sitting in the blind, but when I walk I usually find that my leather jacket is great for beating the cold and the brush. Sometimes all I need is a down vest and/or a Gore-Tex jacket which

has lots of great pockets for film and stuff.

I don't like to wear hats, but when it's cold I grab my Gore-Tex lined wool stocking cap. For those bitter days, a balaclava, a stocking cap which covers your whole head and neck with eye holes, is the answer. And as for your hands, I wear fingerless gloves over my polypro glove liners. I hate it when my fingers get so cold I can't push the shutter but I can't stand not being able to feel the shutter release. This combination has solved my problem.

Now that you are all snug and toasty waiting for the first blasts of cold weather, have you thought about your cameras and film? Virginia winters are rather mild, but if it gets too cold, you have to worry about camera batteries giving up and film becoming so brittle that it breaks in the camera. There are several things you can do to avoid these problems.

I keep extra batteries in my warmest pockets in case a camera refuses to fire. If such an occasion arises, I simply remove the cold batteries and replace them with the warm ones. The cold batteries go into my warm pocket for a "recharge." When not in use, I place cameras in my jacket. This will keep the batteries and film warm enough to continue functioning and avoid breakage. Also, remember you don't want the cameras and lenses too warm or they'll fog up when exposed to the cold again. Experiment so you'll know the right combination for you.

Another possibility is the use of hand and toe warmers. Taping these over battery compartments can keep batteries warm, but be careful not to cook your batteries either! If it gets too hot, sometimes wrapping the warmer in a handkerchief and then placing it over the compartment will give your camera battery just the amount of protection and warmth it needs.

As Virginia sets in for winter, don't duck out of the opportunity to bundle up for a cold weather wildlife photo adventure. □

Recipes

Goose For Winter Dining

by Joan Cone

All of us who hunt wild goose have experienced trying to cook an old, tough one that is chewable! The idea for my preparing boned goose breasts in a crockpot belongs to Mr. and Mrs. Roger Coomer of Williamsburg.

Do not discard the thighs and legs of your geese. These can be turned into tender eating by using any fowl recipe for crockpot or pressure cooker. Remove cooked meat from bones and use in a casserole dish. Also, save your goose and duck livers, and when you have a pound, try the following paté recipe.

Menu

Goose or Duck Liver Paté
Goose Breasts in Crockpot
Potatoes Florentine
Orange and Celery Salad
Persimmon Pudding

Goose or Duck Liver Paté

1 cup walnuts
1 pound goose or duck livers
4 ounces cream cheese, cut into chunks and softened
1/8 teaspoon garlic powder
3 tablespoons mayonnaise
1 teaspoon dried dill
Salt to taste
4 sprigs fresh parsley, chopped fine

In a small saucepan, cover livers with water and boil gently until done; drain. Chop walnuts in food processor until fine. Add small pieces of liver and cream cheese; blend just until smooth. Add the garlic powder, mayonnaise, dill and salt; blend again. Mold into a mound and sprinkle with chopped parsley. Serve with crackers or party rye. (Makes 1 pound paté)

Goose Breasts in Crockpot

2 or 4 skinned and boned Canada goose breasts, (2 breasts per goose, about 8 ounces each)
1 can (8 ounces) tomato sauce
1 tablespoon brown sugar
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
6 sprigs parsley, chopped

Place goose breasts in crockpot. In a small bowl mix together tomato sauce, sugar, lemon juice and Worcestershire sauce. Pour mixture over breasts; sprinkle with chopped parsley. Cover and cook on LOW heat for 7 to 8 hours. Cut breasts into thin slices and serve with sauce. (Allow 1 breast per person)

Potatoes Florentine

2 medium potatoes, pared and thinly sliced
1 medium onion, sliced
1 package (10 ounces) frozen chopped spinach, thawed and drained
3/4 cup biscuit baking mix
1-3/4 cups milk
1/2 cup shredded Cheddar cheese
2 eggs
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon ground oregano
Pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease a rectangular baking dish, 12 x 7-1/2 x 2 inches. Layer potatoes in dish; top with onion. Mix remaining ingredients and pour over top. Bake until potatoes are tender, about 35 to 45 minutes. (Makes 4 to 6 servings)

Orange and Celery Salad

6 Florida oranges
3/4 cup chopped celery
1/4 cup French dressing
Chopped mint
Salad greens

Section the oranges and combine



Persimmons; photo by Diane A. Jones, "HOLDSTILL!" productions.

with celery and dressing. Let marinate at least 2 hours. Arrange mixture on salad greens and sprinkle with mint. (Makes 6 servings)

Persimmon Pudding

Beanie Crispens of Charlottesville gave me this tasty recipe. It makes a large amount but keeps well in the refrigerator.

2 cups self-rising flour
2 cups sugar
1 teaspoon cinnamon
2 eggs, beaten
2 cups milk
2 cups persimmon pulp
1 cup shredded raw sweet potato
1 stick margarine, melted
Whipped topping

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Combine flour, sugar and cinnamon; mix well. Stir in eggs and milk. Add next 3 ingredients and mix well. Pour into a greased 13 x 9 x 2-inch pan and bake for 45 minutes or until a knife inserted comes out clean. Serve with whipped topping. (Makes 15 servings)

Safety

Boat Trailer Handling

by William Antozzi,
Boating Safety Officer

It is a great thing to be able to haul boats from one body of water to another. It is also convenient to be able to get boats out of the water during bad weather and off-season. It is also easier to work on them when they are on dry land.

There are problems. The average passenger cars were made to carry people, not to pull heavy trailers, therefore they will be able to pull only about 4000 pounds maximum without special automotive equipment.

Trailers are rated according to capacity, so they must be big and tough enough to safely carry their loads and be constructed so as to prevent hull damage.

The day before a boat is being moved on a trailer, the items listed below should be checked:

1. trailer hitch and safety chain connections
2. trailer electrical connections, wiring and brakes
3. separate trailer brake system
4. all tires for condition and pressure
5. mirrors for cleanliness and adjustment
6. all lights and flashers

Once underway, tow vehicle operators have some other things to consider. They should reduce speed on downgrades by shifting to a lower gear, thus enabling the engine to do some of the braking.

When driving up long steep grades, dropping to a lower gear and decelerating to approximately 45 mph reduces the chance of engine overheating. Stopping with a trailer in tow requires a greater distance, so drivers should plan ahead and avoid panic stops by shifting to a lower gear and lightly pumping brakes to gradually reduce speed.

Knowing all of the bad things which can happen makes me worry a lot when I drive behind a boat trailer. I wonder whether the bow and stern tie downs will hold. Hundreds of times I have told boaters not to depend upon the winch-line to hold the bow in place.

In addition, a bow tie-down should be used. Safety chains at the point where the tongue fastens to the tow vehicle should cross under the hitch in such a way that they will hold the tongue should the ball-hitch fail. It is important to match the ball-hitch size with the trailer coupler to insure that the trailer stays hitched to the tow vehicle.

Trailer brakes are required on trailers above a certain gross weight. To insure that your trailer is in compliance with the law, check with your state police. Never forget that you have a boat behind you. A frequent rear view mirror check is convincing. Start slowly and drive at reasonable speeds. Maintain a greater than usual following distance. Practice backing until it becomes second nature.

Most boat ramps and roads leading down to them are on a steep incline. It is best to avoid parking or stopping on them with a trailer in tow. However, when this situation cannot be avoided, a number of steps can be followed. With a foot on the brake pedal, the driver should have someone outside the vehicle place blocks under the wheels on the downgrade side. The brakes should be slowly released until blocks are holding the vehicle and trailer. The parking brakes and parking lock should then be engaged and on a manual transmission, the gearshift should be used to put it in first or reverse gear.

Launching is a two-person operation, one to back the trailer down the ramp, while the other guides the driver. A launch ramp is no place to learn how to back a trailer. Sometimes the driver, tow vehicle, and trailer all end up submerged due to lack of adequate

knowledge. If you're new to trailer boating, practice backing your trailer in an empty parking lot or on a quiet street.

At the launching area, park far enough away so as not to obstruct or delay others. Take your time before backing onto the ramp. Waiting allows the trailer bearings to cool down and thus helps prevent water from entering the wheel bearings.

Remember to put in the drain plug before launching your boat. Nothing is more embarrassing than having your boat sink at the ramp. Remove the boat cover, stow all gear, remove all tie-downs, and have fenders and lines in place before entering the ramp. Disconnect the trailer lights from the tow vehicle to prevent dunking hot bulbs in cold water. Re-check the launch site before backing down. Check the degree of slope, water depth, and the surface of the ramp to be sure you have sufficient traction. Carefully back down the ramp until the stern of the boat is afloat. Most wise trailer boaters use tire blocks at this point to help prevent accidental loss of a complete rig. Check the wheel hubs for air bubbles to see if water is entering the bearing area. Have one person enter the boat and sniff for fumes, then turn on the blower for at least four minutes.

When you are ready to come back in, check the launch ramp for water depth, slime, and pot holes to determine if there is adequate traction. Back the trailer to the proper depth as determined during launching. Slowly get the boat back on the trailer using lines if necessary, and secure the bow winch cable/line to the bow eye of the boat. After the boat is securely on the trailer, pull away from the ramp and allow others to retrieve their boats. At this time, remove the drain plug and check for hull leaks. Replace the tie-downs. Fasten the bow safety chain. Check the bearing protectors for appropriate grease levels. Plug in the trailer lights. And drive safely home. □



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